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Conversion to Discipleship

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CONVERSION TO DISCIPLESHIP

PART I

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Dissenting Membership: Vocation to Prophecy in the Reign of God

Discipleship is a vocation to which one can never respond in a final and definitive way. It is a call to ongoing conversion, to an ever deeper appropriation of the mystery of Christ. To be a disciple is to incarnate the identity and mission of Jesus in our own personal, historical, and cultural context. For us, then, conversion to discipleship means formation in and for the American Church of the late 20th century.

In our morning sessions during this meeting we are going to organize our reflections on discipleship around the aspects of Jesus' identity and mission in which Christians have always been said to share, namely, prophecy, priesthood, royalty, and servanthood. I am going to attend particularly to the aspects of prophecy and royalty.

There is a characteristic of our recent American Catholic experience that is at once glaringly evident and profoundly confusing, particularly because it is so discontinuous with the experience which formed most of us as American Catholic children. I am speaking of the deep ambivalence toward the authoritative institutions of both our country and our Church that many of us contend with on a daily basis. Nothing was more integral, even central, to the formation of young Catholics in the American parochial school system of the 1940's and 1950's than the positive attitude toward lawfully constituted institutions summed up in the oft-cited, decontextualized quotation from Scripture, "All authority comes from God."

Obedience to parents, to Church law and personnel, and to civil officials was all of a piece expressing filial submission to the ultimate authority, God Himself, variously imagined as a stern father, a heavenly pope, or the policeman in the sky. Adult Catholics who were sophisticated and discriminating professionals in the secular lives lived unquestioningly with the virtual moral equation of eating meat on Friday, missing Mass on Sunday, indulging in sexual fantasy, murder, rape, and contraception. All were mortal sins that would send the unshriven perpetrator to hell without benefit of counsel. This was the authoritative teaching of the authoritative institution and obedience to lawfully constituted authority was strictly identical with obedience to God (unless, of course, the action commanded was sinful).

Much the same attitude characterized the American Catholic in respect to the civil institution. Catholics were, of course, taught that in a

conflict between Church and State it was not only legitimate but obligatory for the Christian, in imitation of all the martyrs down through the centuries, to obey God rather than human authority (Church=God; State=human authority). However, two factors conspired to keep this teaching purely theoretical for most American Catholics. First was the position in moral theology that just civil law, although human, was sanctioned by divine authority. Catholic moralists were never really comfortable with the theory of the purely penal law, that is, a law whose infraction was not immoral. To break any just law, however morally neutral its content, was a rebellion against lawful authority and therefore against God in whom all authority originated. The second factor was the American political system itself. The separation of Church and State enshrined in the First Amendment guarantee of religious liberty made the likelihood of a real conflict between government and Church remote and assured legal redress of grievances if it should ever occur. America was the promised land, born of the passionate quest for religious liberty and committed to assuring the freedom and well-being of its own citizens and of all of the world's huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The civil government of the United States was, American Catholic children learned, a just government of, by, and for the people, and therefore legitimately enjoyed divinely sanctioned authority. Respect for and obedience to civil authority was just as much a moral obligation as obedience to religious authority.

This attitude toward authority which characterized most Catholics in their relations with both ecclesiastical and civil institutions was not mindless subservience. It was the expression of a profound conviction that both Church and State were, despite human weaknesses, divinely instituted social orders, perfect societies, designed to foster the common good on earth and lead eventually to eternal life in heaven. What I want to explore in this talk is the radical change which has taken place in the American Catholic consciousness in the last twenty years in regard to institutional authority, both ecclesiastical and civil. The basic trust in the overall soundness of these institutions and therefore the legitimacy of their authority which grounded the presumption in favor of obedience even in conflictual situations has been eroded by events of the last two decades. The result is a profound ambivalence of many Catholics toward both Church and civil government.

REALIZATION OF RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

For some combination of historical reasons, the exploration of which is beyond the scope of this paper, human consciousness has undergone some kind of quantum leap during our lifetime. Humanity has always, up to our day, accepted as inevitable and therefore legitimate the determination of some people's lives by other people's decisions. Masters have controlled slaves, the rich have controlled the poor, whites have controlled the people of color, men have controlled women, clerics have controlled the laity, superiors have controlled subjects, and so on. For the first time in world history, in our generation, this arrangement has been repudiated on a world-wide scale. Group after group, in nation after nation, has claimed the right of self-determination. Every liberation movement of our time is the expression of the claim to self-determination by some previously subordinate group. Whatever the cause of this phenomenon, it is indeed a fact and the massive failure of Church and State to come to grips with it

is, in my opinion, the major factor in the undermining of institutional authority. Conflict after conflict in both institutions has taken the same shape, namely, the resistance of a sizable group of members to the institution's attempt to limit their self-determination. For the first time in our history young men in America during the Vietnam War decided that they would not kill or be killed simply because the government said they should. Catholic spouses reacted to Humanae Vitae with a resounding refusal to have the role of sexual love and procreation in their marriages determined by ecclesiastical authorities. Women in both Church and State have decided that men must no longer be allowed to sit in all-male council determining the nature and function of women in secular or ecclesial society. Examples abound, but my point is that neither Church nor State has been able to come to terms with the claim of its members to self-determination and the result has been a rapidly increasing series of situations in which large numbers of American Catholics are resisting the institutional authority they once accepted as the evident manifestation of God's will in their lives.

The situation is complicated by the fact that these resisters do not dispute the legitimacy of the institutions as such. They are not planning the overthrow of the American government or of the Vatican. Nor do most of them intend to renounce their citizenship of their Catholicism. They intend both to remain and to resist. It is this phenomenon of dissenting membership that is the focus of my reflection this morning. How are we to make sense of this experience, in which many of us are involved, of ongoing and radical criticism of the institutions that most profoundly structure our lives and identities? As one journalist put it, "Are we not talking about Catholicism (or citizenship) a la carte?" Does it make any sense to talk about accepting authority if one reserves to oneself the right to decide when and if one will obey? Can we realistically talk about an ecclesial or a civil community if each member takes to him or herself the right to determine his or her own position on matters of vital common concern and the right to act on that position regardless of the directives of institutional authorities? In short, is radical dissent compatible with loyal membership and if it is how are we to understand that compatibility?

I suspect that neither I nor anyone else has a fully satisfactory theoretical solution to this problem which is, after all, quite new. But what I would like to do is suggest a way of thinking about this experience of dissenting membership which might at least allow us to situate ourselves within the question with a little more clarity and conviction.

REFLECTIONS ON MONARCHY AND PROPHECY IN ISRAEL

In what follows, I am immensely indebted to a wonderful little book by the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann entitled THE PROPHETIC IMAGINATION (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). In the book Brueggemann explores the ongoing tension between the monarchy and prophecy in ancient Israel. I am going to use Brueggemann's analysis to explore the meaning and relationship between the prophetic and royal dimensions of Christian identity and mission. My thesis is that there is a dialectic, a tension which can be either creative or destructive, between these two dimensions of Christian discipleship and that it is precisely this dialectic which is at work in the phenomenon of dissenting membership. If prophecy and royalty can come to function in our lives as they did in the

life of Jesus they will energize our commitment to bringing about the reign of God in this world. If, on the other hand, our royal identity degenerates into a participation in what Brueggemann calls the "royal consciousness" our prophetic mission will be domesticated and denatured; and if prophecy loses touch with the reign of God that it must serve we will become rebels without a cause, or mad leaders of the blind.

Let us begin our analysis by briefly recalling the history of Israel's experience of prophecy and monarchy. Israel was constituted a People by her rescue from Egypt and her entrance into the covenant with Yahweh at Sinai. From that time on Israel was a holy nation, the People of God. Yahweh alone was King and Lord, and so, while Israel had judges and elders, military leaders and priests to facilitate the ongoing religious and political life of the people, Israel had no human king, no monarch who stood above the community as a superior source of law and order. All the members of the community, whatever their functions, were subject to the same law, namely Torah, which did not originate with any earthly ruler but had been given to the community by God.

When, in the eleventh century B.C., for political and military reasons that are quite understandable, the people asked the prophet Samuel to give them a king so that they could be like other nations, the prophet protested that setting up a king in Israel would be idolatrous. God is presented as interpreting the people's request as a rejection of Yahweh's reign in favor of a human monarch. Nevertheless, God acceded to the people's demand and Samuel was sent to anoint Saul, thus inaugurating the Israelite monarchy. It was understood from the beginning that the king was chosen by God, anointed by God's servant, and was subject, as were all the people, to Torah, God's law. The king was Yahweh's visible representative among the people but in no sense a vicar, one who took the place of God. God was always present and active among the people. The king was a concession to the community's need for security, in other words, to its lack of faith. Consequently, the monarchy was always an ambiguous reality from a theological point of view.

In very short order the monarchy became concretely problematic in the disobedience and superstition of Saul whom God finally rejected. David, Saul's successor, came closer than any of Israel's kings to realizing the truly religious role of the monarch that God intended. David, despite his sins, never forgot who was really king in Israel. But after David's death, his son Solomon progressively appropriated to himself the divine royalty and so, after him, the monarchy was divided and slipped deeper and deeper into infidelity until both the northern and the southern kingdoms came to ruin and kingship in Israel became a glorious memory founding a messianic hope for the renewal of the Davidic dynasty.

Throughout the period of the monarchy the prophets constituted a kind of loyal opposition. They were so consistently opposed to the policies and procedures of the kings that opposition to the monarch came to be almost a sign of a true prophet while telling the king what he wanted to hear raised a strong suspicion of false prophecy. The prophets did not oppose the institution of kingship as such. They opposed the way it operated. And the kings never disputed prophecy in principle; they exiled the prophets for their opposition to the royal regime. Although prophecy and monarchy were both accepted institutions in Israel, they

were almost always in tension.

What Brueggemann does is to abstract from the concrete experience of Israel the inner structure and reality of the conflict. He discusses not the historical struggle between King Zedekiah and the prophet Jeremiah, between King Ahab and the prophet Isaiah, but the tension between what he calls the royal consciousness and the prophetic imagination. It is this paradigm whose potentialities I want to exploit in relation to the dilemma in discipleship of the American Catholic which I have called dissenting membership in Church and State.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ROYAL CONSCIOUSNESS

First, let us try to understand what Brueggemann calls the royal consciousness. What primarily characterizes the royal consciousness is its identification with the present, with the current regime, with the political and social status quo. Obviously, it is only within the present structure that the king is king. If the monarchy falls the king's reign comes to an end.

There are various possible grounds for asserting that the present system should remain in force. One is that it is really serving the true interests of the people. But this is a very precarious basis on which to found one's royal claims because, if it should happen (as it might at any time) that many people become unhappy or discontented, the legitimacy of the monarchy becomes open to question. The king whose reign is justified by its human efficacy, its capacity to meet the real needs of the people, is really in a position of dependence on the people rather than vice-versa. Such a monarchy is not an absolute one at all. It is a monarchically structured regime, but in substance it is a genuinely communitarian arrangement because the community's needs have a real priority over the monarchy's claims.

There is, however, another way to legitimate a regime, one that can claim that the present system is permanently and irreversibly legitimate regardless of its efficacy in meeting community needs, namely, to claim that the regime was instituted by God. This is the claim of Israel's unworthy kings, of Egypt's pharaohs, of Rome's emperors, of divine right monarchs down through history, and, frequently of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. We notice in each of these regimes the tendency of the monarch to self-identification with the divinity which is characteristic of hierarchical social structure when it wishes to lift itself above the vicissitudes of human change and possible revision. The pharaohs and the Roman emperors deified themselves; Louis XIV called himself the "Sun-King"; the Church talks of its officials as "other Christs" and of the pope as the "vicar of Christ"; religious superiors have often claimed that their will expressed the will of God for their subjects. The royal consciousness legitimates its identification with the status quo by claiming that the present regime is of divine institution and the reigning personnel are God's way of being present to the community.

Once it is established that the monarchy is not the product of human initiative but of the divine will, the monarch ceases to be truly answerable to the people. He is accountable only to God. The people, on the other hand, are accountable to the king who controls access to God as well

as to all material benefits. This double control of both divine and earthly goods gives the monarch immense power which he can then exercise with sovereign liberty because to call his arrangements into question is to oppose God's will. As the monarch accumulates power and wealth the people become progressively more dependent and only those who are in favor with the monarch have assured access to well-being. We see this dynamic at work in Latin America dictatorships and in dioceses and in religious orders.

This is, of course, exactly what happened in Israel. Solomon represents the ultimate realization of the royal consciousness. As he became immensely powerful and wealthy the people became progressively poorer and more powerless. Solomon so appropriated to himself his divine identification that he eventually took it upon himself even to mitigate the demands of monotheism. When it served his political purposes he allowed the cults of other gods to flourish in Israel. Solomon considered himself, and the people considered him, immune from opposition for he was, after all, God's anointed, not the representative of the people.

The only voice that could be raised against the divine right monarch was the voice of the prophet who spoke for God. The prophet was a member of the community, subject like other community members to the royal authority. But the prophet had an independent, charismatic access to God, an access which the king did not control, and on the basis of which he could call the king to account in God's name. The prophet spoke for the community not as its elected representative but as God's representative. In the prophet, championing the rights of the people, we hear the voice of God reclaiming the covenant people from the unfaithful shepherd who has failed in his trust, who has not pastured and protected God's people, but has victimized them for the sake of his own regime. The prophet challenges the king's claim to divine immunity from accountability and reminds him that he was to represent, not replace, God; that he, too, is subject to Torah, not above the law.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PROPHETIC IMAGINATION

Let us look, then, at the prophetic imagination. The prophet is one who can imagine, against the royal contention that the present regime is an eternally valid and inviolable arrangement, an alternative reality. The prophet refuses the royal injunction to worship the status quo as the inevitable and divinely sanctioned arrangement. The prophet looks back to the past, to the promises made to the ancestors and the covenant which enshrined those promises, to the people's free commerce with the living God when they cried out from their needs. And the prophet laments the incongruity between what was promised and what now exists. Because the prophet sees the inadequacy of the present against the fecundity of the promises he can imagine and announce a different future. This is the danger of the prophet to the king. The prophet, by his evocation of the past and his imagining of the future, undermines the present order of things and threatens to bring the king's reign down around his ears. And the prophet does all this in the name of the very God to whom the king appeals for the legitimacy of his regime.

To sum up briefly, then, the royal consciousness is structured by its identification with the status quo. It tries to present the present as the

eternal now, the unchangeable order. It is an order in which power and wealth inevitably accumulate at the top of the hierarchical system and which is immune, as divine institution, from accountability to those at the bottom. It is a system which even God cannot change because, to do so, God would have to act against God's own dispensation.

The prophetic imagination, nourished by a living remembrance of the past, threatens the present status quo by its capacity to imagine and announce an alternative future. For the prophet, God is not irrevocably implicated in any earthly dispensation, no matter how it originated nor how sacred it is. God remains sovereignly free to act again in favor of God's people if only they will recognize Yahweh as the one on whom their true good depends. The prophet sees clearly what neither king nor people see, namely, the difference between the God whose representative the king is called to be and the self-divinized monarch who has surreptitiously taken God's place in the lives of the people. The prophet identifies with God's ancient choice of the people. He announces that God is still on the side of the dispossessed, the lowly, the poor, the powerless as God was on the side of the Hebrews against Pharaoh. The prophet recalls both king and people to the covenant, to trust in God rather than in human strength, to true worship which repudiates any and every claim of king or foreigner to take the place of God among the people.

Now, it is crucial to our purposes to realize that the royal consciousness and the prophetic imagination are not limited to realization in historical monarchs and ancient prophets. The royal consciousness asserts itself in any situation in which the officials of an institution so identify with and invest themselves in the institution that preservation of the status quo begins to take precedence over the real good of the people. This perversion does not have to be the expression of deliberate malice. Usually this self-investment in the institution results from and is expressed as a conviction that the preservation of the status quo is identical with, or at least necessary for, the good of the community.

By the same token, the prophetic imagination emerges whenever fidelity to a community's founding inspiration is effectively evoked to energize movement toward an alternative future which stands more in continuity with that past and thus stands a better chance of improving the condition of those victimized by the present regime.

Basic to the situation with which we are concerned in this talk, namely, that which involves many American Catholics in the experience of dissenting membership, is the fact that there is an inveterate tendency of institutional responsibility to give rise to the royal consciousness in even the most well-motivated officials. People are elected or appointed to office in institutions because the institutions are necessary instruments of the common good and they cannot function without the responsible dedication of those who administer and lead them. Officials are chosen precisely because they see the importance of the institutions and are devoted to preserving them and making them function well for the good of all. But it is this very insight into the importance for the community of the institution that frequently leads the office holder to opt for the institution over the members. The classic principle of institutional expediency, "it is better that one person die rather than that the whole nation perish," contains a built-in escalation factor. During the Vietnam era it was

invoked to justify the sacrifice of a whole generation to a misguided notion of national honor. It has been invoked in religious congregations to justify the repression or expulsion of truly prophetic members to ward off the descent of episcopal or papal wrath on the whole order. The royal consciousness is seldom the result of freely chosen malice or naked hunger for power. It is the creeping disease that is the occupational hazard of office.

On the other hand, the prophetic imagination, precisely because it is a charismatic quality deriving from personal experience of God and the resulting commitment to God's people, especially to the most oppressed, is notoriously difficult to discern. Jim Jones offered an alternative future to some of the people most victimized by the American system. Only the spectacle of nine hundred people dead by their own hands around a cauldron of cyanide revealed the horrible character and tragic dimensions of his ego-blinded vision of salvation. Hitler offered an alternative future to a humiliated Germany and eloquently persuaded a whole nation to look the other way while he exterminated six million Jews to bring about that future. There is nothing simple about the struggle between the royal consciousness and the prophetic imagination.

My suggestion is that it is only by contemplating, and making our own in disciplined practice, Jesus' living of the tension between the royal and prophetic dimensions of his vocation that we can begin to mediate between our own legitimate institutional commitments and our prophetic vocation to combat the royal consciousness which corrupts those very institutions into shrines of the status quo rather than servants of the community and its purposes.

JESUS' PROPHETIC RESPONSE TO ROYAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The early Church recognized in Jesus the fulfillment of all Israel's messianic expectations. He was the long-awaited Davidic king; he was the transcendent realization of the prophetic vocation of Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah. But we have become so used to speaking of Jesus as prophet and king that we often fail to attend to the fact that he related very differently to each of these two dimensions of his messianic identity and mission.

During his lifetime, Jesus resisted any application of royal titles to himself and fled from the people who wanted to make him king. It is important to note that he not only refused to allow himself to be made a political king in opposition to the Roman imperial rule; he also avoided participation in the religious power structures of his own people. Jesus was not a pharisee, a lawyer, a scribe, a member of the Sanhedrin, or a priest. He was a simple layman who held no official position in either the ecclesiastical or the civil sphere. Consequently, while he manifested an appropriate respect for both institutional regimes he was not personally identified with either. By his own choice, there was no soil in the human experience of Jesus in which the royal consciousness, in either its religious or its civil form, could develop. Jesus did not assume his royal identity until he entered Jerusalem to be handed over for execution by the institutional authorities. It is interesting that tradition has never been able to establish conclusively whether Jesus' execution should be attributed to the animosity of the Jews or of the Romans. It is perhaps more to the point to realize that at the deepest level, the level of their opposi-

tion to Jesus, the two institutions were identical. Jesus the prophet was put to death by the institution in the grip of the royal consciousness. The fear of the Jews that the continuance of Jesus would lead the Romans' "taking away our place and our nation" and the Roman fear that this man would overthrow the representative of Caesar are the same fear. Jesus' message was as dangerous for the synagogue as it was for the palace because what he was announcing was that both regimes were provisional, relative human institutions. God was alive, well, and present in Israel and God had not transferred the divine preference from its age-old object, namely the poor and oppressed, to the prestigious and powerful who held office in Church and State. Jesus announced the end of both regimes by calling into question their identical false claim, to be eternally valid, divinely sanctioned, absolute dispensations. For Jesus the only absolute regime which made the only truly royal claim was what the evangelists call the basileia tou theou, the reign of God. No civil or ecclesiastical regime was identical with or the exhaustive incarnation of that reign. All human institutions, religious and civil, exist to help realize that reign among God's people, not to take its place.

The true royalty of Jesus, which had nothing to do with the royal consciousness, but consisted in his divine filiation, was expressed in his identification with the reign of God. Consequently, it was not something he could claim during his public life because he knew well that the royal consciousness was as much at work in the hearts of the victims of the oppressive regimes as it was in the officials. The people wanted to make Jesus king, not because he inaugurated among them the reign of God but because he seemed to be a better version of their earthly rulers. They wanted to replace their current institutional idols with a new idol. As Jesus says in Ch. 6 of St. John, "You seek me, not because you saw signs, (that is, not as a locus of divine revelation,) but because you ate your fill, (that is, because you think I could fulfill your immediate material needs better than the reigning regime)."

Jesus refused a royalty already corrupted by the royal consciousness and functioned openly only as a prophet. As prophet he evoked the past, the covenant God made with the people in their poverty and powerlessness, and he energized them to hope for an alternative future. He announced that the reign of God would belong to the poor, the meek, the hungry, the dispossessed, the powerless. It is a reign that cannot be earned but must be received, the way that a child receives what is offered. It is a reign in which mutual love among equals will replace all the hierarchical relationships built on inequality, the relationships of power and authority and domination which structured the society of the pagans and oppressed the people of God.

But Jesus did not just promise future reign; he acted to inaugurate it in the present. He broke the grip of the ecclesiastical establishment by declaring all religious laws relative to human good and by giving free access to divine forgiveness to those who did not qualify for it by meeting institutional requirements. He broke the grip of the political establishment by declaring the equality of people and thus announcing the relativity of Rome's dominion in the present and the inevitability of its demise when the reign of God would come in all its fullness. He broke down the barriers of stratified society so necessary for hierarchy to function by eating with sinners, consorting with Samaritans and pagans,

and calling women to be disciples and apostles along with men. Jesus the prophet reminded the people that God's covenant was still effective, announced the reign which was coming, and inaugurated it among them. But he avoided identifying himself publicly as a king until the moment when he was beyond the corrupting reach of the royal consciousness in the people, as the victim of the royal consciousness of the institution. Only when he was definitively involved in the ultimate reversal that characterizes the divine reign, in the poverty and powerlessness of death from which only God could rescue him, did he claim his royal identity. From the cross he reigned as king.

Our faith teaches us that all of us participate in the royal and prophetic dimensions of Jesus' identity and mission. But since the Council of Trent it has been customary in Roman Catholic circles to speak of the hierarchy alone as participating actively while the laity participated passively in Christ's mission. The prophetic dimension of the active Church was usually equated with teaching established doctrine and the royal dimension with hierarchical government. In fact, the teaching function came to be exercised as an aspect of the government, resulting in the notion of an absolute authoritative magisterium characterized by the same authoritarian triumphalism that marked the Church's government by a clericalized hierarchy. The laity, whose participation in the identity and mission of Christ had been characterized as passive were thought to take part in his prophetic identity primarily by being docilely taught and in his royal identity by being meekly ruled. Little attention was focused on the way Jesus had related to his royal and prophetic vocation.

PARTICIPATION OF CHRISTIANS IN PROPHECY AND ROYALTY OF JESUS

Obviously, Vatican II has legitimated a massive revision of this Counter-Reformation approach to discipleship. But it has not provided much clear guidance for the ordinary Christian disciple in understanding what it might mean for us to participate actively in the prophecy and royalty of Jesus. What I have been trying to suggest in this talk is that participation in the royalty of Jesus has nothing to do with identification, active or passive, with ruling institutions, ecclesiastical or civil. It has to do with identification with the reign of God, an identification in hope that anticipates its final realization, but also an identification in action in helping to realize it here and now.

One of the most important insights of post-Conciliar ecclesiology is that the Catholic Church is not identical with the reign of God but exists to serve that reign. To absolutize the institution of the Church (and a fortiori the nation) is not a recognition of nor a participation in the royalty of Jesus. It is an exercise of the royal consciousness (what the Council Fathers called "triumphalism") against which, as prophets, we must cry out for it is an idolatry that blinds people to the coming of the reign. To participate in the royalty of Jesus is to so identify with the reign of God that we see clearly the relativity of all human regimes, that of the ecclesial institution as much as that of the civil institution. To participate in the prophetic identity of Jesus means, at least in part, to combat the royal consciousness in Church and State especially when it sacrifices persons to systems. As humans and as Christians we participate in institutions; but as disciples we recognize only one regime as absolute, the reign of God.

I suspect that many committed American Catholics are acting out of an experiential but unthematized realization of the relativity of institutions to the absolute claim of the reign of God when they dissent from oppressive institutional policies and practices of both Church and State while remaining respectful members of both. What they are refusing to do is to concede to the royal consciousness its claim that the regime is absolute. They are not refusing to admit its real but provisional legitimacy.

It may well be that the ecclesiastical institution presents a more painful challenge to conversion for the contemporary Catholic, especially the person actively involved in ministry, than does the civil institution. It is easier for most of us to exercise our prophetic discipleship against the government because the blasphemy of a claim to absolute validity and authority is more blatant when it is made by a non-religious institution. It is much more difficult for Catholics, especially those of us who were brought up in the most absolutist period of Church history, the Counter-Reformation period that lasted from the Council of Trent to Vatican II, to relativize the institution of the Church. The great temptation is to connive with the royal consciousness when it emerges in ecclesiastical officials, even if we ourselves are the victims. We have been so educated to respect the religious claim to obedience which the institutional Church makes that we are ill-prepared to accept ourselves as dissidents, even when our most fundamental rights are at stake.

CHALLENGES OF BEING A LOYAL CRITIC

There are times, of course, when we can legitimately suffer persecution for justice' sake as Jesus did. But we pervert the Gospel ideal of meekness when we make it an excuse for allowing ourselves to be dominated rather than face the struggle to come to maturity in our relationship with institutional authority. Not to resist the royal consciousness is to support and encourage it. What victimizes me today will claim a sister or brother tomorrow.

Even more problematic is the temptation to stand by silently while others in the local or wider Church are victimized by the abuse of power. It matters little whether those in power are being deliberately and maliciously oppressive or whether, like the synagogue officials Jesus warned of, they think that by destroying their enemies they are giving glory to God. Our commitment to the reign of God is a vocation to prophesy, in season and out of season, against the royal consciousness whenever it prefers its own good to that of human beings.

One of the most difficult aspects of the responsible assumption of our vocation to prophecy that conversion to discipleship requires is accepting the necessity that falls eventually on most of us to criticize those institutions in which we are most intimately and immediately involved. Jesus warned us both that our enemies would be those of our own household and that the prophet would be least acceptable in his or her own country. It is difficult enough to denounce injustice and oppression in distant lands and in remote institutions - and this must of course be done - but it is more psychologically painful to denounce it from within. It is the Pope who must insist that it is no more acceptable for the curia to repress theologians it does not agree with than for Russia to persecute dissenting intellectuals. It is the bishops, who realize that the local

Church's ordained ministry is being seriously undermined by an unnecessary insistence on the male celibate clerical system, who must champion the rights of the Christian people to ministry over the claims of institutional regulations; it is the local pastor who must refuse to implement unjust episcopal orders to discriminate against women ministers; it is religious who must take up the defense of fellow members who are being repressed for reasons of ecclesiastical expediency. It is the laity of the local parish who must defend their own rights to assemble and to participate in decision-making that directly affects them. Perhaps this is the litmus test of our conversion to our prophetic vocation: to inaugurate the reign of God in the immediate context of our day to day lives by acting to liberate those nearest us, expecting that our fate will not be all that different from that of Jesus.

In summary, then, it seems to me that conversion to discipleship, the taking up with renewed seriousness of our vocation to share in Jesus' royal and prophetic identity and mission, places particular demands on the American Catholic in the 20th century. It is a conversion to active acceptance of the tense difficult stance of dissenting membership in our Church and in our country. We cannot escape or ignore or idealize our implication in ecclesiastical and civil institutions. But we must resist the royal consciousness in ourselves and prophetically denounce and combat it in the institutions. This will only be possible if our whole-hearted commitment to Jesus gives rise in us to a passionate and ultimately fearless identification with the reign of God, that regime of reversals whose great sign is the resurrection of an executed Prophet.

TO BE A DISCIPLE IS TO INCARNATE
THE IDENTITY AND MISSION
OF JESUS
IN OUR OWN PERSONAL,
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT.
S. SCHNEIDERS

CONVERSION TO DISCIPLESHIP

PART II

SANDRA SCHNEIDERS, IHM

Practical Reflections and Further Implications

At this point I want to defend myself against claims of total unrealism by discussing some of the obvious problems and problematic implications of what I have been saying. Just let me summarize for a moment what I have been talking about: I think we are involved in this country, in the church in this country in particular, and elsewhere in the world too, in a transition. And the transition, or "falling apart" as Rosemary Haughton was saying last night, is a coming apart at the seams of something. We were formed in our church to an ideology of uncritical acceptance of institutional church authority. And that might have been justified in a certain time and a certain situation.

What is happening to us is that that ideology is being challenged by our heightened awareness of the facts. This awareness is due partly to the increase of information, the rapidity of media communication, and the much broader experience on the part of religious and ordained ministers. We've come to a heightened awareness that institutions can and do oppress people, that they do not always function for the common good, and that they function oppressively in these situations in which they deny or oppose self-determination.

Self-determination was not seen as a basic value in times past and it is now seen as perhaps the most basic value. So when institutions oppose self-determination of people or groups, we begin to see these institutions as oppressive. Thus a new formation is called for--not a formation to an ideology of uncritical acceptance of institutional authority but to some kind of a well-thought out and courageous stance of dissenting membership. And I don't think this is just for the short haul. We probably are going to live for a long time in this situation of belonging to institutions of which we cannot whole-heartedly and without further ado or criticism simply accept all the ramifications. This will probably be our situation throughout our life time. And so, our problem, our formation problem, it seems to me, is how we elaborate this new stance.

The realization that we come to is, I think, that participation in the royalty of Jesus does not mean uncritical acceptance of, or identification with, any earthly regime, whether that be a civil regime, an ecclesiastical regime, or a religious order regime. But it does mean a single hearted identification with the reign of God, the reign already present, the reign of God coming. And it means that this reign of God is not and never will be exhaustively incarnated in any human institution, religious or civil.

It seems to me that this is what we must internalize to give us the basis from which to make the discernments that are necessary. Participating in the royalty of Christ is the very opposite of triumphalism, of the absolute claim of any institution to represent God, or of any person to represent God, in a kind of exhaustive and complete way for other people. The divinizing of institutions is what Brueggemann calls the operation of the royal consciousness. But it is precisely the participation in the royalty of Jesus that is identification with the reign of God as the eschatological absolute that will energize us for prophecy. It is out of our participation in the royalty of Jesus that we are energized for participation in the prophecy of Jesus.

The work of prophecy is to denounce and to dismantle the triumphalistic claims of the royal consciousness whether they are operative in the church, or in religious congregations, or in civil society, or in families. Thereby we free people, including ourselves, to work for and to live in the reign of God. I insist on including ourselves because this isn't a "we-they" operation--the "we" being prophets and participants in the royalty of Jesus who take on the "them" who are, of course, monarchs in the grip of the royal consciousness. It is in the heart of all us that the royal consciousness is at work. And it is precisely in those institutions to which we belong that we experience how the royal consciousness operates in ourselves. It is okay to tackle something I don't participate in too much. I don't have any problem tackling Republicans, or Democrats for that matter, at this point. It is much more difficult for me in the diocese in which I work to take on the bishop. And even more difficult, to oppose the leaders in my own religious congregation.

So what I want to say a little bit about are the problems with regard to formation, whether we are talking about the forming of ourselves or of other people. As you notice, I have not been talking about our forming other people. You know much more about that than I do. I am talking about forming ourselves because I don't think we can form other people (or foster the development of other persons, as I would prefer to put it) beyond what we have been able to realize in ourselves. So I am talking about our own formation primarily.

PROBLEMS WITH ABSOLUTIZING INSTITUTIONS

There are problems in the formation of people for prophecy in the reign of God which is really what I am talking about when I talk of discipleship in the church in America. There are problems from the side of the institution; there are problems from the side of prophecy itself. From the side of institutions, I think that all of us realize that institutions are simply necessary. We cannot mobilize energies toward good objectives unless we institutionalize them. And how much institutionalization we need depends on how large the group is and how various the resources are and so on. Institutions cannot function, that is they cannot stay in place and do their job, unless there is a certain loyalty to them. If we have everybody in the institution in a constant state of rebellion against it, we might just as well not have it. Nevertheless, that does not change the fact that institutions by their very nature are highly susceptible to the emergence of the royal consciousness, to the self-divinization of office holders. This was much more blatant in times past when people actually

claimed to be "other Christs" and to be "vicars of Christ" and to take the place of God, claims that now sound at least vaguely blasphemous to us. But the tendency toward self-divinization for the person in office expresses itself in the inability to distinguish between God's will and his or her own will. The same tendency expresses itself in people who, in responding to that leadership, are not able to distinguish between the bishop, the religious superior, or whoever, and God. This is built into the very nature of institutions because institutions tend automatically to exalt those who hold office within them.

We saw a terrible example of all of this in the American presidency when we heard a president saying: "When the President does it, it isn't wrong." What is this but a claim to divinity, to be above the moral law. It is an inveterate tendency of institutions to become so preoccupied with their own survival that they begin sacrificing people to systems. "We've got to keep the schools open. We've got to keep the hospitals going. We've got to get new vocations to the congregation" or whatever. And... if we don't have institutions, then we won't have new members and if we don't have new members then the congregation won't continue. Wait a minute! Why do we have the congregation in the first place? Not to keep the congregation going. But this tendency is built into the very dynamics of institutions.

When Tom and I were discussing with Carol the topic for this conference, we saw a certain usefulness of Jungian categories for thinking about the tension between institution and prophecy. (Tom will use this in pointing to the tension between servanthood and priesthood.) I suppose most of you are somewhat familiar with Jung's four functions of the personality: thinking versus feeling, sensing versus intuition. Jung describes a kind of continuum between thinking and feeling; that is, at one end the tendency of the thinking function is toward objective rationality in making decisions and organizing things, toward objective analysis by a kind of impersonal rationality and logic, order, fairness, impartiality and so on. At the other end, at the feeling level, there is the tendency to derive one's basis for decision making from personal value, from what seems to be good. And both of these, of course, can run amuck.

What happens in the royal consciousness seems to be that the thinking function runs wild--that it becomes so involved in itself that it begins not to see the importance of human values. Now you can have the other end of the spectrum too. Human values become so important that fairness and justice no longer count, logic is simply put out to pasture. But if either of them run wild, you get an unbalanced situation. Institution building, institution perserving, institution utilization, are primarily the work of the thinking function. When we institutionalize we build rationality and order into our relationships and our operations so that they will accomplish something. Institutional arrangements regularize procedures and they assure a certain objectivity in our operations. This is all to the good. It is necessary if we are going to undertake significant projects, but the danger is that if the thinking function runs wild we will simply overwhelm the feeling function, simply overwhelm our concerns with persons and get so caught up in reasonableness and logic and order and concern for running a tight ship that we forget about the sailors. When the institution begins to take precedence over people, we

have the emergence of the royal consciousness. My contention is that it is built into the very nature of institutions that they will tend in this direction. It is not an accident that happens with some institutions; it is of the very nature of institutions to tend in this direction. Consequently, we must always be perpetually on guard against the tendency of sweet reason to become cold rationality, of healthy objectivity to become rationalism. The status quo is then absolutized and begins to be equated with the present incarnation of the reign of God. At that point nobody can argue with it. Who wants to take on God?

The formation problem that we face is how to foster in us and those we work with a healthy respect for and an appropriate loyalty to the institution which does not degenerate into identification with the royal consciousness. It would be easy enough to mobilize people to protest but how do you mobilize people to appropriate loyalty but not to blind subservience? How do we develop a genuine sense of belonging and identity with the group without creating the company person, without inculcating that "group think" which makes membership equal to ideology? To me this is the real formation problem.

My suggestion here is that the only way I can see that we can move in this direction is by fostering a primary commitment to the reign of God, a real and not just an intellectual one. I would appeal to what I think Rosemary Haughton was talking about last night, the priority chronologically--if you will experientially--of praxis: the theory that it is only through experience which is then theologically reflected upon that one can come to a functioning recognition of the reign of God in operation. The results of such reflection are then carried back into a better praxis so that young people learn by repeated practice to distinguish between human institutions and human dynamics and group projects, however good, on the one hand, and the reign of God on the other hand. They learn to participate creatively and positively but not to absolutize. It seems to me that this is one of the most important arguments for the importance of the experiential approach to formation as opposed to simply filling people full of all the theory and then sending them out without further assistance to practice what we have taught them.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE PROPHECY

There are also problems from the side of prophecy and these are the problems that are most readily seen by institutional types. Prophecy, of course, we would all admit in the abstract, is a necessary charism in the church--as long as you don't do it in my back yard. Prophecy, as we have said, is notoriously hard to discern. The confusion between true and false prophecy goes way back to the book of Deuteronomy. Nobody has come up with an infallible criterion for discerning in the moment which is true and which is false prophecy. One might say that one way to discern is to see whose prophecy comes true. Well by that time, of course, the congregation could be blown up. That's a very safe criterion for the false prophet who just keeps repeating: "Well, it hasn't come true yet, but it will."

Again, I think there's some usefulness in the Jungian insight about the difference between intuition and sensation or how people get the in-

formation, the data, on which they make the decisions out of which they act. The intuitive function leads a person to grasp what is really going on, not so much on the basis of cold, hard facts that are publicly available, but from some kind of wholistic internal sense that the intuitive person is very sure of now. But he/she cannot verify it, check it out, or appeal to publicly available data. The prophet is the person who acts out of an intuitive grasp of the signs of the times. Prophets see in the signs of the times the will of God for the present moment in a way that they cannot totally justify. The contrary function, the balancing function--sensation--roots the person in empirical reality. As we all know, people can get so rooted in concrete hard-headed fact that they have no vision whatever. They are the dullest of mortals! The positive function of sensation, however, is to make one present to the here and now, attentive to the limited situation in the real world in which we live.

What happened with Jim Jones, among other things, of course, is that he saw a utopian vision that was so unrelated to reality, to the real, concrete, limited possibility of the land and the situation with which he was working, that his own ego become so inflated that he literally divinized himself. Prophecy is primarily a function of the intuitive dimension of personality. A prophet sees in and through and beyond the here and now and grasps the true significance of the divine plan in what seems to be a limited and insignificant set of phenomena. The prophet is an implacable foe of the expedient solution which can appear moral only if we refuse to attend to its cosmic significance.

Now the problem, of course, is that the true and false prophets use the same rhetoric. Both lay claim to a vision that goes beyond what others can see and that is rooted in an experience that is not available for empirical verification--an experience of prayer and an experience of political vision. Both claim to be reading the signs of the times. Both claim to be announcing the will of God. So we ask what is the difference between Martin Luther King and Jim Jones? What is the difference between smashing nuclear weapons' nose cones and smashing gays in defense of public morality? The difference between the true and the false prophet is, of course, the experience from which the prophetic utterance comes and that is precisely what is difficult to verify.

A true prophet is, like Jesus, the one who derives his or her intuitive judgment and subsequent action from direct personal experience of God in prayer. That is the authentic source of prophetic insight. Jesus prayed before all the prophetic actions in his life. And the things that it led him to do are quite unusual if you think about them rationally. He prayed before he chose his disciples and instead of choosing people who could have given him some leverage, who had some kind of economic or political or intellectual clout, he chose highly unlikely people who had nothing to offer to the project. Jesus prayed before he worked his miracles. Sometimes he said, "I can't work any miracles in this place" because intuitively he knew that that which makes miracles possible, namely the faith of those who are going to participate in them, was not there. He did not simply go around doing miracles on people whether they liked it or not, but he had an intuitive sense of where the power of God could operate. It was his prayer that enabled Jesus to choose death, a choice without too much future by normal standards. Out of his prayer

Jesus read the signs of the times and derived intuitive, that is, not sensibly justifiable, conclusions about what to do, as well as the strength with which to do it.

What we see, by contrast, in the false prophet is that his or her insight and activity is rooted in his or her own ego operations. We see that the needs and the desires and the plans and the visions of the false prophet are not fully conscious, not able to be criticized by him or her self. The desires and visions of the false prophet take on a certain uncriticizable autonomy within the personality. They tend to dominate the prophet and drive the prophet rather than their being what the prophet brings into operation. We see the operation, for example, of some of these kinds of drives in the false prophecy prevalent in our own society. We see the operation of unintegrated sexuality, for example, in the crusade for family protection legislation which is really attempting to make laws to oppress any group that the person is afraid of, whether they be women, gays or whoever it is that this individual cannot deal with. We see the operation of the unrecognized and unacknowledged fears and terror of people who have not come to terms with their own needs, such as their need for power. We have seen this particularly in religious congregations and dioceses when we have a very convoluted, subterranean, unrecognized, and unintegrated drive for power that sacralizes itself and victimizes other people. We see the inside-out ego operations of the individual who was so deprived of identity and power as a child that he or she does not seem to exist at all and tries to handle this problem by entering a religious community as a way of simply skirting for good the whole identity issue. Such a person gets instant identity, a name, group membership, a job, security. They don't have to face any of the problems of identity. And when these problems emerge, in the later life of the person, as various kinds of "prophetic inspiration", they don't know where all this is coming from.

The difference between the true and false prophet is where the prophetic intuition and inspiration originates. And the only way we can judge it in ourselves or somebody else is in the fruits of their intuitions. I think when we look at Jesus we see that his choices lead him in the direction, not of satisfying the ego-dominated needs for sex, power, identity, but in the direction of self-sacrificing types of behavior, efforts to bring to others the salvific message he was impelled to announce regardless of its consequences for himself.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRUE PROPHET

The formation problem that we face is, I think, how do we foster in people the prophetic imagination without licensing people to divinize all their crazy ideas. This is even more difficult than the previous problem we were talking about. Ministers above all, particularly in our day and age when our ministry so often takes us into the public forum, simply must become competent in personal spiritual discernment. There is no other way. Those who are not competent in discernment are menaces in the present church, especially if they have energy. The difficulty with this is that discernment, contrary to some peoples' opinion, is not a technique. It is not something we are going to teach the novices this week. As we all know, discernment is a skill, something that we exercise. But it is based in an interior liberty, on a self-knowledge and a courage which comes from

a long process of self-formation in discipleship. It cannot be learned in a day and it cannot be learned in a cocoon. It has to be developed by actually learning how I am involved in real situations (which again raises the issue of praxis preceding theory). Reflection in praxis raises the question of where my inspirations and intuitions, and energy are coming from. We can get just as much energy from inverted ego operations as we can get from contemplative prayer. The fact that the person is energetic in the pursuit of his or her goals does not guarantee that they came from God. And so it is in those situations in which we are affectively involved --in which we experience the release of energy in ourselves--that we must practice discernment. There we have to discern what is going on in ourselves and we will usually find out that it is a mixture of things. By continuous reflection we get better and better at knowing what proportion of these influences is coming from God and what proportion is coming from ourselves. Ministers in particular have to develop a certain balance, regardless of their own preferences, between intuitive perception of the demands of the gospel on the one hand, and the current situation, the tradition, the community life, and so on which concretely forms the context in which they act on the other. And, it is these factors which will test the validity of the prophetic imagination as it functions in the minister.

One of the problems with Jim Jones, of course, was that he took his whole community off to a place where there was no critical community to critique results. He took it to a place where there was nobody and nothing to raise any kind of questions about what he had to present. It is characteristic of the prophets of the Old and the New Testaments that they made continuous appeal to the tradition--not the kind of appeal to tradition which says, "Nothing may be done for the first time" or that says, "Whatever was done in the past must be mindlessly repeated in the present." Theirs was not that kind of appeal to tradition but rather a deep, interiorized sense of the tradition that allowed it to function as a constant divining rod applied to innovative and creative behavior in the present. A fundamental continuity with tradition warned the prophets of basically perverted initiatives. So the prophets were appealing to tradition when they said that if Israel placed its hopes in chariots and princes it was going to lose. It might win the political battle but it was going to lose the war that counted. To appeal from tradition, but to come up with novel policy--namely not to fight as they once had fought against Pharaoh by running--but to allow themselves in fact to be taken over, was a result of this prophecy.

Also characteristic of the prophets was their involvement in the community life. They did not go out by themselves into prophetic isolation to dream up what was good for the community. They were deeply involved in the community life. We don't find prophets coming from outside the community to tell the community what is good for it, but we find the prophet arising from within, deeply experienced in the ways of the community. Those who don't share the community's life and struggle, it seems to me, are really not called to prophesy within it. Those who leave the community because they cannot deal with the stress and the strain are not the ones who are going to prophesy to it. Sometimes people say: "What good reason do we have for staying within certain communities that we belong to?" One of them is that of having the credentials of authentic prophecy.

Likewise characteristic of the prophets was their continuous prayer, their constant talking to God. "Fiddler on the Roof" is a good example of this kind of continuous dialogue with a very unruly God. Jesus does not claim to derive his insight into the will of God simply from his own work and life experience. He constantly goes off by himself to pray. When something goes right in his ministry he says: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because it pleased you to do this." So one of the things that he sees present in his work always is the work of God.

It is also characteristic of the prophets that they have the capacity to sustain the effects of unpopular witness. It is easy to be a prophet when everybody agrees, or when all the significant people in our lives agree. But what was characteristic of Jesus and the Old Testament prophets was their ability to sustain over the long haul the inevitable effects of unpopular witness. True prophets have rarely announced what people want to hear. And a popular prophet by definition has very poor gospel credentials. We should be a little leery if we are popular in all quarters. Only the chameleon will work on every outfit.

So, in summary, what we are talking about in talking of formation for the twentieth century American church or formation for prophecy in the reign of God is what I understand as the dialectic between participation in the royalty of Jesus understood as the single-hearted commitment to the reign of God and the prophetic mission of Jesus understood as the ongoing critique of the royal consciousness. How are we to foster the development of contemporary ministers who are not anti-institutional but who are genuinely prophetic seems to me to be the question that we are facing. What seems to be emerging is that that formation must be aimed at deeper and more highly personalized spirituality--not highly individualized, but highly personalized--characterized by rootedness in tradition, community belonging, interior prayer, and courageous witness grounded in the capacity for true discernment. And at the same time it must be carried on in the context of theological reflection on actual ministerial experience that prepares a person for a lifetime commitment to a praxis-theory model of ministry.

Perhaps our greatest need is not for different programs of formation but for genuinely holy and courageous people in formation positions.

STUDY GUIDE FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

CONVERSION TO DISCIPLESHIP

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Theoretical Reflection

1. Discuss some of the radical changes that have taken place in the American Catholic conscience in the last twenty years in regard to institutional authority, both ecclesiastical and civil?
2. What were the attitudes of most Catholics toward institutional authority before 1960? Share how your own personal experience has/has not changed your attitudes toward institutional authority in the last two decades.
3. Discuss: Humanity has always accepted or allowed as inevitable and, therefore, legitimate, the determination of some people's lives by other people's decision. Cite examples.
4. What do you believe is the cause(s) of the phenomenon that every liberation movement of our time is the expression of the claim to self-determination by some previously subordinate group?
5. In what ways do you feel that the Church and state are coming to terms and recognizing the means used by dissenting membership to undermine institutional authority?
6. How are we to make sense of the experience of ongoing and radical criticism of the institutions that most profoundly structure our lives and identities?
7. How can we reconcile talking about accepting authority if one reserves to oneself the right to decide when and if one will obey? Can we realistically talk about a civil or ecclesiastical community if each member takes to him or her self the right to determine his or her own position on matters of vital common concern and the right to act on that position regardless of directives of institutional authority?
8. Is radical dissent compatible with loyal membership and if it is, how are we to understand that compatibility?
9. Compare and contrast the ongoing tension between the monarchy and prophecy in ancient Israel with the meaning and relationship of the prophetic and royal dimensions of our Christian identity and mission as lived by Jesus.
10. Discuss the identity and role of the royal consciousness within the reign of God.

11. The tension between the prophetic imagination and the royal consciousness can be either creative or destructive. Discuss how this tension can be experienced today in the ecclesiastical and civil institutions.
12. Discuss the demands that are placed on the American Catholic of the 20th century when one takes his or her conversion to discipleship and his or her vocation to share in Jesus' royal and prophetic identity and mission seriously.

Practical Reflection

1. How do we foster in ourselves and those we work with a healthy respect for and an appropriate loyalty to the institution which does not degenerate into the acceptance of royal consciousness?
2. How do we develop a genuine sense of belonging and identity with the group without creating the company person, without inculcating that group-think that makes membership equal the ideology?
3. How can we foster a primary commitment to the reign of God--that which is not just intellectual but experiential?
4. What is the difference between the true and the false prophet? What criteria can be used to determine the real prophet? What are the characteristics of Jesus and the true Old Testament prophets?
5. How do we foster in people the prophetic imagination without licensing people to divinize all their crazy ideas?
6. How are we to foster the development of contemporary ministers who are not anti-institutional, but who are genuinely prophetic?